HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	**Capitol Hill Historic District**	( ) Agenda
Address:	**1245-7 C Street, SE**	(**x**) Consent
		(**x**) Concept
Meeting Date:	**February 23, 2012**	(**x**) Alteration
Case Number:	**12-145**	( ) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	**Amanda Molson**	( ) Demolition
		( ) Subdivision

Owners Thomas and Heather Foley, with plans prepared by Davis Buckley, FAIA, request concept approval for rooftop and rear additions to 1245 C Street, SE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description
Constructed in 1903, 1245-1247 C Street, SE is a two-story, brick bayfront rowhouse. The building was originally constructed as two apartments, and the two historic entrances on the front elevation reflect this use. The building itself is very deep (77'), and it sits on a generous lot with a one-story garage at the rear. The house is the end unit on the alley, and a series of double-hung windows look out at the alley from the side elevation. The property is located directly across the street from a public park, which is bounded by South Carolina Avenue (itself a wide street) to the north. Due to the exposed side elevation of the house along the alley and the numerous vantage points from which the building can be viewed due to the park, careful consideration must be paid to the massing and design of any new elements.

Proposal
The applicants will undertake much-needed restoration of the interior this neglected property, which has experienced moisture infiltration and termite damage over many years of vacancy. As outlined in the attached report from the applicants' structural engineer, interior structural changes (in-kind replacement or added support) will be conducted as needed to address safety and code issues. Interior partition walls will be removed to reconfigure spaces. The rear wall and a portion of the roof structure will be removed in preparation for the new additions, as is common practice for this scope of work.

Retaining the two entrance doors on the façade, a third unit will be added by constructing a rooftop and rear additions, introducing a new entry door from the alley, and reconfiguring the interior layout. At three stories in height, the rear addition will rise to join the rear addition, with a small deck area on the third floor providing a setback in massing as viewed from the rear. The first and second floors of the rear addition will extend 10' in depth from the rear wall of the house, and both the rooftop and rear addition will be inset 6' from the alley-facing side elevation of the main block. The rooftop addition is proposed as masonry construction, with the rear

addition primarily constructed of wood-framed expanses of glass. In lieu of a wood fence, the applicants plan to build a row of hedges supported by a galvanized metal frame.

Evaluation

Additions
At first glance, it appears quite difficult to design a rooftop addition with limited visibility on this alley-abutting rowhouse located across the street from a triangle park. However, this project benefits from the existence of a tall parapet wall that will screen most of the rooftop addition from public view, particularly the portion closest to the front of the building. The applicants have also included a side setback of 6' on the alley-facing elevation of the rooftop addition, further minimizing views by reducing overall mass and preserving the height and slope of the house as viewed down the alley.

A mockup installed for review by the HPO showed that the rear corner of the addition will come into view along South Carolina Avenue. To mitigate that limited visibility, the applicants have moved to masonry construction for the rooftop addition (a change from the metal paneling originally proposed), allowing the addition to more seamlessly disappear against the backdrop of masonry rowhouses. Given the considerable distance at which the addition comes into view, the use of compatible materials, and the limited portion that can be seen, the massing is in keeping with the Board's directive that rooftop decks and additions should be unobtrusive in street views.

In evaluating the design, it is important to note that visible from within this alley are several additions, new construction projects, and fence replacements that feature non-traditional fenestration, materials, and/or overall design, such that a modern addition and green garden wall at the subject property will not be novel additions to this square. 1230 D Street, SE features a three-story rear addition that integrates glass block, casement windows, and projecting eaves overhanging the alley. The house directly across the alley from the subject property (1243 C Street, SE) features large expanses of glass on the rear elevation and a brick garden wall that spans the depth of the backyard. An inner-alley house and garden, largely obscured by a tall masonry wall, was constructed at 1253 C Street, SE a number of years ago. The Board recently approved the near-total reconstruction of a long-suffering alley warehouse at 1216 D Street, SE (rear) to convert it to residential use, and the owners have consulted with the HPO on a side yard fence that honors the industrial character of the building.

The Board's window standards DCMR Title 10A, Chapter 23) welcome compatible, contemporary fenestration in new rear additions to historic buildings, stating:

> *2311.2 Windows in rear additions to historic buildings should generally reflect the less formal design that is characteristic at the rear of most historic structures. Alternatively, windows in an addition distinguished by deliberate contrast should be compatible in scale and character with the historic building overall.*
>
> *2311.4 This guidance is intended to promote design compatibility with historic buildings and districts, rather than to discourage good contemporary design or creative*

architectural expression.

Alley Door
The Board has generally afforded some flexibility to the reconfiguration and resizing of window openings on secondary elevations, provided that general compatibility is achieved. Section 2308.3 of DCMR Title 10A, pertaining to window replacement on secondary elevations of small buildings, states, "Alteration of window openings is discouraged, but some flexibility may be applied." Likewise, the Board's design guidelines (*Walls and Foundations of Historic Buildings*) address the creation of new openings in walls by stating, "If a new opening must be created, for example to make a building functional, it should be located on a rear, non-character-defining wall. The size, design and detailing of the new opening should be compatible with the character of the wall."

Recognizing the relatively unarticulated nature of this building's alley-facing elevation and the minimal change in dimensions needed to simply drop the bottom sill to create a door opening, the proposal for an alley entrance does not raise major preservation issues. The existing arch over the window will remain, with the width of the opening undisturbed, allowing the existing window opening to be easily restored at a later time if desired. In lieu of the shuttered door shown in the plans, the applicants will be using a simple metal gate.

Meters
This project will presumably require three electrical meters (possibly four, if a house meter is needed), and under no circumstances should the electrical meter boxes or the gas meters be located on the front of the building or in the front yard (which is public space). The meters should be integrated into the units on the interior, or the meters should be placed on the rear elevation of the building in an area that is obscured from public view. The applicants should consult with Pepco and Washington Gas as the final construction drawings are prepared, and it is recommended that they refer to the Board's draft guidelines for utility meters as planning gets underway.

In addition to meter placement, the applicants should work with the HPO on final details for the garden fence, any replacement shutters proposed for the alley elevation, and restorative work that may be needed, such as window and door replacement.

Recommendation
<u>The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept to be consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, contingent on the conditions below being addressed, and that final approval be delegated to staff. This should not be construed as approval for any necessary zoning relief.</u>

- <u>Electrical and gas meters must be located on the interior of the property or on the rear elevation in a location obscured by fencing. The specific location should be reflected in final construction drawings at the time of permitting.</u>

- <u>No parapet walls shall be added as a response to potential code requirements. Roofing on the additions should be fire-rated.</u>